

# State receives grant for reading program

By JENNY BONE MILLER  
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GROTON — Connecticut will receive a \$7.4 million grant next year for the Reading First program, a curriculum and professional training program aimed at elementary schools.

U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-2nd District, announced Tuesday morning in the children's division of the Groton Public Library, that over six years, the state will receive approximately \$42.5 million in federal support for the program, a part of the No Child Left Behind legislation passed last year.

"This should help to dispel the

myth that any part of No Child Left Behind is an unfunded mandate," Chris Doherty, U.S. Department of

Education Director of the Reading First Program, said.

The State Department of Education will use \$5.9 million of the \$7.4 million to award subgrants to 17 school districts, including

Norwich, Plainfield, Putnam, Windham and New London.

Approximately 17 schools out of 150 eligible schools will receive

about \$300,000 apiece. The chosen schools will be allowed to buy materials for new reading programs and train teachers in proven techniques for reading. A Reading First coordinator will be assigned to each of the schools to recommend new curriculum. Reading First is scheduled for full implementation in January 2004.

Schools that will be chosen will have at least 13 percent of students eligible for Title One money and 35 percent scoring below average on the reading portion of the Connecticut Mastery Tests, Fran Rabinowitz, author of the state grant application, said.

In choosing the schools to re-

ceive the money, a process scheduled to end during the fall semester next year, program coordinators will look for those that have a solid three-year plan, so that at the end of three years, they will be model schools for other schools that will receive funding as the Reading First program expands.

"There is not enough time or money for every district to create a new reading curriculum. We're not going to mandate our curriculum, but we'll certainly recommend it," Rabinowitz said.

In addition to the 17 schools who receive money for programs and curriculum development, teachers in all the districts will be allowed to

participate in the 11 days of professional development that the grant will fund at the beginning of the 2003-04 school year.

"Certain funds are focused on certain schools that are at risk, but there are programs that are available to all teachers in all districts throughout the state," Simmons said.

Last year the state funded about \$2.5 million for early reading programs, a number that has been constant for about five years, although next year's budget has not been set. The \$7.4 million in grant money will be in addition to the state funds already in place.

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Simmons